United States Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Research and Development

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Press Release

EPA Administrator Christie Whitman Receives Briefing and Tour of Homeland Security Research at Research Triangle Park, NC

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For Immediate Release: May 23, 2003

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NC ...US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman on Friday, May 23, received a briefing and tour of homeland security research being conducted at EPA in Research Triangle Park (RTP). Scientists and engineers in RTP are working to develop new methods for detecting hazardous chemical and biological contaminants in buildings and to provide better ways to clean up and dispose of contaminants that may result following a terrorist attack.

EPA has invested $50 million in fiscal year 2003 for the Safe Buildings Program, managed and coordinated at RTP. The safe buildings research is being conducted for EPA's National Homeland Security Research Center, headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, and established in 2002.

The EPA campus in RTP is the center of EPA's national air research program where research is conducted to improve understanding of exposure and health effects of air pollutants and how to prevent or control air pollutants. Also located at RTP is EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning & Standards which, with state and local agencies, implemented BioWatch, a monitoring network used nationwide to provide early detection of the release of biological agents to assist local and state health officials and emergency managers with rapid response. BioWatch was operational before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom to protect Americans from possible biological attack.

At the world-class research campus, scientists are using a broad array of research capabilities, including a combustion research facility that houses incinerators used to simulate the burning of contaminated materials. The EPA will not use any hazardous chemicals or biological pathogens that could be used for warfare or by terrorists at the RTP campus. Scientists and engineers will only use surrogates or compounds that act like hazardous agents, but are not harmful. Agreements are in place with the U.S. Department of Defense and contractors with the capabilities to safely and securely work with any hazardous materials if necessary.

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The tour highlighted several of the Safe Buildings Program research projects under way at the research facility. They are:

1) **Development of a rapid-response detector for chemical and biological agents and toxic industrial chemicals that will shorten the time for analysis from hours to seconds.** A prototype commercial unit is being developed for use by emergency responders when hazardous chemical or biological agents are suspected in a building. In addition, the technology is being evaluated as an early-warning device that could be connected to a heating and air conditioning system in a building. The early detection device could trigger the system to shut down, thus minimizing the spread of the contaminant.

2) **Advancement of science to safely incinerate contaminated materials such as carpets, fabrics, ceiling tiles, furniture and personal protective equipment used in clean-up.** Using an on-site research incinerator, engineers will assess the effectiveness of incineration to safely dispose of these materials. This research will provide guidelines for safely and effectively disposing of hazardous chemicals and biological agents.

3) **Enhancement of an infrared detector system, developed at EPA for detection of airborne contaminants, for use following a terrorist attack.** The technology uses a beam of infrared light to identify components in the air and has been used for monitoring outdoor emissions at industrial sites, hog farms and along highways and roads. Scientists are investigating its use on a remote-control vehicle that could be sent into potentially contaminated rooms or ducts in a building to detect contaminants in the air. The technology has the potential to be used as a continuous monitoring system for large buildings such as airports, theaters, subways or bus terminals.

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